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Northwest Seen as Growth Area in Drug Smuggling

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SEATTLE, Jan. 21 — The Coast Guard's seizure of a small Honduran coastal freighter last weekend with 447 pounds of cocaine hidden aboard has helped to confirm some officials' suspicions that Puget Sound is a new, major entry point for drugs.

Quint Vaillanueva, the regional Customs Service commissioner, said he believed that increased pressure by law-enforcement agencies in the Southeast had caused drug smuggling rings to shift operations to the Pacific Northwest. "Areas on the West Coast are becoming a smuggler's paradise," the

official said.

William Redkey, an assistant United States attorney here, said the extensive and isolated coastlines of the Olympic Peninsula and the islands in the San Juan group make Puget Sound desirable from a smuggler's point of view. The cocaine taken last weekend was "one of the largest drug shipments ever seized on the West Coast," he said.

Today the captain of the seized vessel, Guillermo Rodríguez-Reina, 48 years old, and the first mate, Favio Soto, 40, both Colombian citizens, were ordered held without bail until a detention hearing next Monday. Nine crew members were also held while Federal officials interviewed them.

John Carlson, a customs agent, said in a sworn complaint that Captain Rodríguez-Reina was thought to have been previously involved in marijuana smuggling operations and that Mr. Soto had been arrested and convicted in 1981 of smuggling 19,900 pounds of marijuana into Palm Beach, Fla. He was later deported.

Freighter Aroused Suspicion

Michael D. Fleming, a spokesman for the Customs Service in Los Angeles, said intelligence reports had indicated that a small coastal freighter of Latin American registry was being used to carry large shipments of co-

caine into the Pacific Northwest.

Last Saturday the Coast Guard cutter Point Countess sighted the Honduran vessel, the Eagle I, on radar as she passed near Neah Bay on the Olympic Peninsula. The ship had not reported her presence as required, and officials said that as the cutter approached, Eagle I put forth heavy smoke and turned toward Canadian waters.

"The freighter's master said he had no trouble, but was clearing his stacks," according to Lieut. Comdr. Tom Pearson, a Coast Guard spokesman here, but the cutter's commander was suspicious because the ship had turned toward Canada and because she was in heavily traveled American waters without notification.

Commander Pearson said suspicions were heightened after the freighter was boarded and a light load of Pana-

manian hardwood was given as the reason for the voyage.

"It just wasn't enough cargo to justify the trip," the spokesman said, "so it was decided to bring the vessel into Port Angeles for a search."

Other Smuggling Incidents

In a concealed space that had been welded closed, searchers from the Customs Service, the Drug Enforcement Administration and the local police found 205 plastic bags filled with pure cocaine. The officials' estimates of the value of the cargo ranged from \$14 million wholesale to \$100 million retail.

Officials say the cocaine seizure follows the discovery of large shipments of heroin entering the United States in this area. Last fall ice buckets being brought through Seattle-Tacoma International Airport by a Hong Kong busi-

nessman were found to be insulated with heroin, and 212 pounds was seized.

Thomas Moore, the Customs Service port director at Anacortes, Wash., north of Seattle, said, "We find a lot of small stuff for personal use and retail sales in checking people off the international ferries."

And in the Yakima area, where many Mexican immigrants come to work in agriculture, illegal aliens are used extensively by smugglers of a Mexican heroin known as "black tar," according to Kent E. Lundgren of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The Seattle police said most of the 24 people arrested last year on charges of smuggling heroin were Mexican citizens who had entered the United States illegally.